

skin too tight over slender bones by drakarifire

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Summary:

They've essentially decided to throw their lives away and live together. Eddie can't help but think of the what-ifs.

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Author's Note:

Eddie's my favorite and I love him.
Doesn't mean I can't be a little mean to him tho.

If Eddie was being honest with himself (and he was trying very hard *not* to be because honesty in this particular instance also meant negativity) he didn't think any of this was going to work. Sure it all sounded like a great idea while they're cuddled up on a bunch of mattresses floating high off the adrenaline of killing their childhood nightmare, but reality had to come crashing back in eventually. As much as Eddie felt like he was thirteen all over again, he wasn't. He was a forty year old man with an office job and a wife that looked far too much like his mother.

So, he kept expecting someone to snap out of it and see reason.

He supposes that it could have...probably even *should* have been him, but then Richie would smile at him. That soft, Eddie only smile, and the gay panic he'd been having since he crashed his car a lifetime ago would make him thirteen all over again.

So every "You good Eds?" was met with a genuine, "Yeah, just nervous, I guess." Then Richie would wind their fingers together and squeeze his hand and all of Eddie's doubts and adult preoccupations would vanish like smoke.

If Eddie couldn't be the voice of reason, then he figured that Stan would at the very least. He'd always acted like he was 40 years old, even when he'd been a kid, so it was kind of a shock to see him throwing himself so thoroughly into this whole thing. Especially after he and Richie came back from their drink. Richie looking like he'd aged a year or two, which was concerning, but Stan looking more alive than he had since that summer. Almost like they'd swapped energies.

He wanted to bug Richie about it, especially when he sat with his back against the bed and closed his eyes. Away from Eddie's side for

the first time since they'd come out of Neibolt. More than that he wanted to crowd in close and kiss the dark circles on his face away, rub his thumbs over the tear tracks he could still faintly see on his cheeks. He'd always been able to tell when Richie was crying, even when he tried to hide it, but he also knew that pushing just made Richie attempt to hide it even more.

So he focused on Stan instead.

Scooting over to the best of his abilities, the others were huddled around Ben's laptop looking at the house, they were all going to be supposedly living in. Planning how they were going to get to Colorado and what they'd do with the extra rooms. It left Eddie, Stan and Richie as outliers, like satellites scattered across the mess of mattresses on the floor. Eddie settled a little heavily beside Stan, bumping their shoulders together good-naturedly.

"So...you think this is gonna work out?" There was really no use in beating around the bush. They'd never been the type, both of them being far too blunt and open, especially when it came to each other. "Not that I don't want to it's just, you can see how ridiculous it is right? Like that's not just me?" Maybe it was the risk analyst in him, the hypochondriac. The boy raised to see the worst in absolutely every situation. He can't help but see all the ways this could go wrong and it felt like it was suffocating him.

"Yeah. It's gonna work."

Stan's voice was so sure that it startled him for a moment. His head lifted, blinking at his friend, like he was trying to see whatever it was that Stan was seeing. He'd always envied Stan's seemingly uncanny ability to just...know things. To look at something and figure it out, never once weighing options before making his decision, and always somehow making the right one.

"How do you..."

"I don't know." He looked solemn for a moment, considerate. His arms were wrapped around his knees and he let his chin rest on them now, a soft smile turning up the corner of his lips. "I guess it's kind of like how you never get lost. I just...I know this is the right decision. I

know this is going to work out.” His head didn’t move, but his eyes shifted to focus on Eddie. “Not that this isn’t a completely batshit idea and we’re all probably going through some serious midlife crisis bullshit, but it’s going to be worth it.”

Despite himself Eddie laughed, and some of the anxiety leaked out of his chest. “Fuck.” He huffed, head shaking, “I really hope you’re right Stan.”

“I’m always fucking right, Kaspbrak.” Stan smirked, “It’s part of my charm.”

“Whatever asshole. Your ego’s as bad as Richie’s, do you know that?”

“That is absolutely the worst thing you’ve ever said to me. I don’t know if we can be friends anymore.”

Eddie smirked, bursting into laughter as Stan shoved him hard in the shoulder, and tried his best not to think about what-ifs.

Granted he was Eddie Kaspbrak and thinking about what-ifs was literally his entire career so that lasted about two minutes. Richie seemed better at least, and there wasn’t this growing sense of dread hanging in the air anymore. They weren’t going to be separated again. They had each other, for however long they could stand to be together, and even with all of Eddie’s doubts he had to admit that the idea made him happy.

He just couldn’t shake the feeling that things were going to fall apart.

“Dude, you’re shaking like a fucking chihuahua it’s making me nervous.” Richie was driving, casting furtive glances in Eddie’s direction, like he was sitting next to a ticking bomb.

“I’m not-” Okay, maybe he kind of was. His arms tightly wrapped around his toiletries bag, teeth grinding almost painfully, the closer they got to the town limits. He almost wondered if maybe Richie’s seats had some sort of massage function but nope...all that vibrating

was just him.

Eddie and his fucking *nerves*.

“You so are Eds. I can feel it from here.” Richie’s hand dropped from the steering wheel, seeking out Eddie’s forcing him to release his death grip on the bag so he could tangle their fingers together. Unlike all the times he’d done it before, the gesture didn’t provide instant relief. The what-ifs still raged, his mind still whirled uncomfortably, and the threat of the Derry town border and all it represented was looming steadily closer. “What’s wrong Eds? C’mon talk to me. Is it about the divorce?”

“No- no, it’s not that.” Eddie shook his head, “It’s not. I’m not even-”

“Is it me?”

Eddie has to blink at that. The road in front of him almost looks like the inside of a carnival fun-house mirror. It stretched impossibly thin and elastic before snapping back to normal at the sheer ridiculousness of that question. “What?” Is all his brain can seem to process in terms of words, his mouth too dry and his tongue way too fucking heavy.

“Do you-” Richie’s voice cracks, and there’s something in the tone of it that Eddie doesn’t like at all. Like whatever prompted that question has been festering inside of Richie this entire time. “I mean I know I... and we haven’t really...I’m just saying if you’re not-”

“*Jesus fucking Christ Richie*. I kissed you first.” Eddie came back into himself like a trapped fire being sucked out a window. He’s almost surprised Richie couldn’t hear the loud whoosh that he could swear was his soul catapulting itself back into his body. Their hands were still locked together so he used that to his advantage and pulled Richie’s up to his lips, pressing a kiss to the knuckles. “I don’t regret this, dipshit.”

Richie risked tearing his eyes away from the road for a second, and Eddie did his best to convey everything he felt in that one brief glance. All the love that made his chest feel like it was on fire, like he’d rip the entire world apart with his bare hands to make sure

Richie kept smiling.

"I'd divorce Myra a thousand times over for this."

"Not just cause she looks like your mom?"

"Well yeah, that too, but I'm mostly doing it for your dick."

"I knew it." A sage nod in the direction of the road, it reminded Eddie that they were almost there. Any second now and Derry would be in their rear view mirror and his fingers tightened unconsciously around Richie's.

"Hey, Eddie. For real, what's up?" Richie's voice had softened, and Eddie felt like he could lose it beneath the loud pounding of his heart in his ears.

"I just..." He licked his lips, swallowing hard, and stared unblinking at the world stretching out in front of them. "I think I'm freaking out."

"No shit."

"Sh-shut up." A snap with no bite, eyes still glued ahead. "I mean like- fuck. Can we do this? Are we-" He could feel his chest starting to seize in a way that was unfortunately familiar. *Asthma attack* a tiny, frightened voice told him. A lie, an anxiety ridden lie, but one that had sunk its teeth into his lungs and refused to let go. Richie was squeezing his hand again and he focused on that, focused on pulling air in and out in slow controlled breaths.

"Are we what?" Richie coaxed, voice still quiet.

Eddie let his eyes close if only to block out the way the road seemed to drop off in the far distance, like they were going to hit an edge and fall off. "Sometimes. Sometimes it fucking feels like...like the universe has it against us." He feels something stinging in the corners of his eyes and he knows that it's tears, knows that he's crying even before he has to stifle the sob rising up his throat. "I keep thinking we cross that line and we forget again. Th-that it doesn't matter that we're together. That I'll look over and I won't know who the fuck you are..."

“We won’t.”

“Y-you don’t fucking know that Richie.”

“No, no I don’t.” Richie’s voice sounded a little watery and Eddie hated that it was his fault. Wished they could just pull over or turn back to the Inn and soak up each other’s presence a little longer. “What I do know is that I fucking missed you, Eds. I didn’t know who the fuck you were, I didn’t know your name and I didn’t remember your face, but I never forgot *you*.”

Eddie’s eyes opened, but he didn’t look at the road, didn’t even give it a passing glance. Frozen too intently on Richie’s profile, his cheeks shining with tear streaks, his jaw set so tight the muscles were hard cords beneath the skin. Awed at his words, at his face, at the fact that he was here holding Eddie’s hand.

“I think I’ll die if I have to forget you again.” Eddie’s voice was hoarse and distant to his own ears. He felt far away, thrown down to Earth while Richie was floating somewhere close to the moon.

“Good thing we’re not going to forget again then, huh?”

God he wants to believe that, and maybe he starts to, when his eyes catch on the sign that signals the end of Derry. Maybe he holds his breath until his head starts to swim and keeps his eyes glued to Richie’s face like he’s trying to burn it into the soft tissue of his memories.

Hadn’t he done that once? Ages ago. The first time, when they were young and terrified because by then they both knew what happened when you crossed the border. Eighteen years old and stealing glances at Richie every chance he got, wishing he could stare without anyone saying shit to him about it, so he could carry that face seared into his eyes like a photograph.

“What if none of this works out? What if-”

“Eddie. I love you. Think about that. Just focus on that for me, okay?”

He’s quiet for a moment, chewing on his bottom lip, and finally

turning his gaze back to the road with a soft sigh. "Okay." He says finally, and Richie gives his hand another squeeze before releasing him to hold back onto the wheel. "I love you too."

They don't go to Florida on the way there, but there's a consensus that group vacations are going to be a thing so it doesn't matter. Plus, at this point, Mike could ask for the moon and they'd do their best to figure out how to give it to him.

Instead they head straight to Colorado, and Eddie does his best not to worry about this all crashing and burning around their ears the entire way there. They elected to fly, springing for first class seats. He considers staying awake for the flight but he's already spent the entire drive to the airport and the wait for their flight driving the Losers up a wall with his anxieties. If he can't let himself worry about the big looming chasm that's their future, then his brain defaults to something familiar. He rattles out statistics about flights and sickness, spending hours bitching about how unhygienic airports and airplanes are in general.

He knows he's wound up tighter than a nun, but he can't fucking stop himself and it almost makes him feel dirtier than the unimaginable quantity of germs floating in the air around them.

At some point some guy coughs too chairs down from them as they're waiting to board and all that nervous energy just explodes out of him in a torrent. All wild hand gestures and speech so fast he doubts the unsuspecting stranger catches even a word of what's being yelled in his face.

He's only vaguely aware of Richie and Mike hauling him back like they're trying to restrain a rabid dog.

"Eds. Eds! Jesus fuck, breathe man." Richie has to plant his considerable size in front of Eddie, like he's trying to cut line of sight. Behind him Mike is trying his best to apologize to the man who looks an almost comical combination of bewildered and terrified.

"Cover your fucking mouth when you cough dickwad!" Eddie hears

himself screaming, his skin feeling too tight around his bones to care that he's causing a scene.

"Eddie. Calm down." Richie is cupping his face now, as best as he can while avoiding the band-aid that's still plastered to his cheek. "Hey. Hey, c'mon look at me, Eds."

Eddie is breathing so hard it's a rasp crawling its way up his throat. His hands instinctively grasp at Richie's wrists like he's trying to ground himself, and maybe he is. It doesn't work. The current of anxiety is so strong he feels like he's drowning, his chest constricting painfully beneath his ribs.

"Guys." Richie's eyes don't lift, they're glued to Eddie's. Eddie's vision is starting to swim. "Hey guys, little help. He's freaking out."

"Here, Rich..." There's a hand at his back, a guiding pressure. "Sit him down." It's awkward walking with their hands on each other like this, even more so for Eddie who's moving backwards. Trusting his friends to lead him wherever they want him to go. He collapses hard onto the plastic airport chair the second the back of his knees hit it, and Richie doesn't even hesitate to crumble down to his knees with him. Like his hands are now a part of Eddie's face and he's got no other choice.

He knows he's being ridiculous, that's the worst part. He knows that he's being insane, that the worries and fears are just stagnant leftovers from his mom's suffocating hold on his childhood. Her words about disease and destruction, about how frail and weak he is, about how the world will fall apart beneath his feet at any second. They're barbs buried deep into his subconscious. A poison seeping in his veins that steals the air from his lungs.

He's throwing his life away. He's gay. He's in an airport and he's going to catch every single disease mother nature and mankind have cooked up.

Eddie-bear, how could you...

Richie's hands are on his face. Stan's fingers form a tight grip on his left arm, Bev's on his right. Bill's arms slide down his shoulders like

the fasteners on a roller coaster. Mike's kneeling next to Richie, one hand squeezing Eddie's right knee. Ben mirroring him on the left.

Eddie lets his eyes close, lets himself focus on their hands, and the sudden hum he feels radiated from six points of contact. It's low and slow, and it rolls through his heart like a gentle ripple across the surface of a lake.

His breathing starts to slow, the bodies around him relax in tandem with his own. When he opens his eyes Richie is right there- concern scrunching his face, all their years apparent in the deep furrows and lines. *Frown lines*, Eddie thinks, *not laugh lines*. *Richie should have laugh lines*.

"Hey, buddy." Richie's voice is soft, "You good?"

Eddie doesn't trust himself to answer, so he sinks into the chair, pushing deeper into the circle of Bill's arms. He chooses to nod instead, and sigh out a calm breath of air.

Richie smiles at that, gentle and earnest. Eddie's sure they've caused a scene. Wouldn't be surprised if this whole situation ends up on the internet. Which is why he's surprised when Richie rubs his thumbs gently across Eddie's cheekbones, brushing away the remnants of his anxiety induced tears, before leaning in to press their lips together.

It's a chaste kiss, but Eddie finds himself smiling into it just the slightest bit when it lingers.

"I'm okay." He says finally, "I-I'm...I'll be okay." His breath shudders a little when he talks, his entire body is still shaking. He feels dizzy and tired, but the others are all pressed in so close and that hum that rolls through them is more grounding than any placebo he's ever taken.

They all look reluctant to pull away, but their flight is boarding soon and Eddie elects to dig some pills out of his carry-on. He doesn't trust himself not to have another breakdown once they're in the air, and he knows he's half right when he feels the signs itching under his skin as they find their seats.

He knocks out not long after they're in the air, but somehow he knows that Richie holds his hand the entire flight.

He'd like to say that the anxiety leaves once they're in Colorado, or even as they're standing in front of their new house. He wishes it was as easy to lay all his anxieties to bed the moment he walks through that threshold, because it feels right in a place where there are no words to describe it. A universal right. Like seven young kids coming together one summer.

His brain feels groggy and slow, dragging itself through cotton, but the threat of anxiety lingers like a shroud. He's yawning, leaning a little heavily against Richie's side.

"Home sweet home guys." Ben says, grinning at them as they shuffle into the living room. The house is huge, open concept and modern. It's essentially a mansion, fully furnished with a beautiful wall of windows looking out at the mountains. Ben's arm is around Beverly, but they're not looking at the view, they're looking at the rest of their friends gathered around the room.

Eddie had never once pictured himself living in Colorado or in a house like this one, and yet it feels so jarringly like home that something inside of him feels like it's clicked into place.

"You really outdid yourself this time Haystack." Richie's smile is genuine but edged with exhaustion. "I'm all for a grand tour but I think I need to get Spagheds here to bed." He's already guiding Eddie towards the stairs, and it's probably a testament to how tired and worn he is that he doesn't bitch about the nickname.

"Alright hon, tell us if you guys need anything."

"Will do Bevv." Richie salutes as he guides them up towards the bedrooms.

They pick one at random, and Richie sets him down on the edge of the bed. "How're you feeling?"

“Drugged.”

Richie snorts, “No shit.” His hands are on Eddie’s face and this time Eddie lets himself lean into the touch, his eyes closing. “You took like four Ambien.”

“I took two dickwad.”

Richie’s lips pressed against his forehead. “Whatever, point is let’s get you to bed, alright?”

He could only manage a low hum of agreement. Getting momentarily to his feet and helping Richie strip him down to his boxers. He doesn’t realize until he’s curled up under the blankets, his back pressed against Richie’s chest, that this is the first time they’ve seen this much of each other since the last time they’d gone swimming in the quarry. He’s almost mad at himself for not appreciating the moment a little more, but then he’s too tired and Richie is warm compared to the cold air around them.

“I love you.” Eddie knows he’s falling asleep, his eyes have closed already and his body feels like it’s sinking, in a not entirely unpleasant way. He feels compelled to say it before he does.

“I love you too.” Richie’s arms pull him closer, his face burrows against the back of Eddie’s shoulder. “Now go to sleep. Everything’s gonna be okay.”

He feels so warm and safe in that moment that for the first time he thinks, *yeah*.

Everything is going to be okay.

Author’s Note:

I picked Colorado because I’ve always wanted to live there. Yay for living vicariously through fiction :)

If you have any ideas for scenes you want to see lmk!
Writing for this verse is turning kind of therapeutic for me so I’d love to do so much more.